

# The Labour Organiser

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And WE say—Well done!

## SIX MONTHS AFTER

**The Local Parties tell of their experiences,  
trials and triumphs in Six Months of Wa..**

In our January issue we published a striking article by Mr. J. T. Baxter, of the Head office of the Party, under the caption "Around the Local Parties." That article gave a review of the manner in which constituency parties were facing up to war problems and of their position after three months of war.

With the beginning of this month we had six months of war and we have, therefore, reached a stage when there is something to be learnt from an interchange of experiences throughout the country.

We conceived the idea of taking a number of typical parties and asking their officers to tell us of their difficulties and the manner in which these have been countered. We have been overwhelmed with replies and we can only print a selection as below.

These stories of local party difficulties due to the black-out, to evacuation, migration, enlistment and other peculiarities of the war position, and of the manner in which our locals have triumphed over their difficulties, make epic reading. They monopolise our space in this issue but we believe our readers will agree with us that it is worth it.

To the authors of each of the following accounts we tender our heartfelt thanks with good wishes for the future.

### Woolwich

*We have by us this month the Annual Report of the Woolwich Labour Party—a document to inspire and to envy. We might have asked our old friend, Coun. W. Barefoot, or Miss Mary Crout, J.P., to write again for our readers in this series of stories. But we find the matter exceedingly well done in this month's "London News" and we therefore do no more than to reprint what is said there. Nor need we comment further.*

Woolwich Labour Party planned for a General Election in 1939. Propaganda, organisation, and resources were developed right up to the outbreak of war.

Early in the year many public meetings were held, there was a distribu-

tion of 20,000 leaflets each month — 160,000 in all, together with the same number of the "Citizen." This was a fine piece of work by the Ward officers and members, and it is the most reliable testimony to the efficiency of Woolwich Party organisation.

On the financial side an election fund was opened, and the accounts published in the Annual Report give a detailed list of affiliated and Party organisations which contribute no less than £217 in readiness for the General Election.

Like every other Party, Woolwich has had to adapt its activities to war-time conditions. But since the initial dislocation there has been steady reorganisation and consolidation. The membership meets in the aggregate instead of as Ward Sections, but the

five Women's Sections continue their weekly afternoon meetings and the two League of Youth branches have amalgamated their meetings. Nor has propaganda ceased, for 20,000 copies of the Party pamphlet "Labour's Peace Aims" have been distributed, and to keep contact with the membership, the "Pioneer," a quarterly journal, began publication in December.

On December 31, 1939, the Party had a membership of 4,870. Its income from this source was £625 as against £740 for the previous year. Truly a remarkable result in face of all the difficulties. It is interesting to note that the Woolwich Party had a large individual membership in 1914 when the contributions amounted to £281.

With its splendid record and unique fund of experience, we need not doubt that the Woolwich Party will continue to thrive, even in war-time.

## East Lewisham

*East Lewisham is what one might term a mechanised Party with several salaried officials. Its problems and progress are therefore of unique interest and the thoughtful article below from the pen of Mr. J. W. Raisin, Secretary and Agent, will be read with unusual interest.*

The war has not, up to the present, had any obvious ideological effect upon the Party.

What we are suffering from are the physical conditions.

The chief of these is the **blackout**. A large part of the constituency consists of housing estates, both municipal and private. Distances are considerable and meeting places are not too accessible. Meetings of members have proved rather difficult to organise, but are gradually becoming easier.

Our Party is highly centralised. This has made for strength in many ways during this period, but the blackout slows down every operation enormously and decentralisation of action, with central supervision, is becoming the practice.

**Evacuation** is another problem, but this works both ways. Where children have gone away, mothers in some cases have turned to the Party for com-

panionship. Where adults are concerned—as civil servants, etc., trained workers have been lost.

**Overtime** is beginning to make itself felt as a serious factor.

**Unemployment** is still an important but declining factor.

**Conscription** has not yet seriously affected us. The numbers in any case are not likely to be of material importance, but the loss of the individuals concerned may be serious.

The statement of accounts of a big membership Party usually reflects the state of health of the organisation. The obstacles I have indicated are evident from our financial returns.

Subscriptions are down. 1938—£600; 1939—£500 gross. Nett figures £400 and £350. Membership figures are down from 4,500 to 3,853 at end of 1939. This is due to two factors:—

(1) That we have not been able during this winter as for several winters past, to engage in large-scale membership recruitment.

The September, 1938, crisis also adversely affected this work.

(2) Changes in the collecting arrangements made necessary by war-time conditions.

Income from speculative efforts (two) draws annually and a weekly competition) is reduced. (Total nett income from these sources—1938, £800; 1939—£700.)

Here the reduction is due, substantially, to uncertainties in sports arrangements.

To obtain, and retain, income figures of this order, professional and semi-professional assistance has been found to be the most effective method. It is to be noted that the nett figures given are those after payments for these services have been made.

At the outbreak of war the staff of the Party consisted of the Secretary and Agent, full-time Organising Assistant, full-time Collector, part-time Housekeeper, and three part-time Collectors. In addition to these, full-time voluntary assistance had been provided by the Secretary's wife for a number of years.

Of these, the Secretary, the Organising Assistant, the Voluntary Assistant, and the Housekeeper are still employed.

The collecting had been placed upon a semi-voluntary basis, with the Organ-



sing Assistant in charge and personally responsible for collections from all members.

The members' weekly competition has been continued under the direction of the Voluntary Assistant, on a somewhat reduced scale, but without substantial modification. By means of his effort, not only is a substantial weekly income obtained, but unfailing contact is maintained with a substantial number of Party members. The average weekly profit on this venture in 1938 was £7. In 1940, if conditions remain similar to those now existing, it may be expected to be about £5 per week.

The two draws (Christmas and Derby) are run on a fully centralised system, the distribution and collection of books to members being modified since the war from semi-professional to voluntary, with professional supervision. Occurring infrequently it is not easy to make comparisons, but Christmas, 1938, produced £200 nett profit and Christmas, 1939, £150.

By taking care to increase the productivity of our ventures, the losses have been minimised.

At the end of 1939 it was possible to show a substantial improvement on the position on September 3rd and a slight improvement over December, 1938.

In all these efforts, the compilation of records at the Central Office has been the most important factor in the past and is deemed so for the future. The work of individuals is known to the office, is properly recorded and thanks in some suitable form sent at the appropriate time. Thus, all Area Officers (80 in number) engaged in the Christmas Draw received a Labour Party Diary with an individually typed letter signed personally by the Parliamentary candidate.

Two matters not much reflected in financial returns should also be dealt with.

It was recognised that the war must make a heavy and increasing drain upon the Party's manpower. This could be countered by putting women and youths into men's places. Theoretically women and young people have equality in the Labour Party with adult males. In practice it is observable that the **direction** of the Party is substantially in the hands of men.

That direction might be seriously weakened through the substitution, for example, of experienced Executive members, by well-meaning and hard-working folk who have not had directive experience.

The meet this situation, schemes were adopted when war seemed imminent to provide the women's organisations, and individual women, as well as the League of Youth, with a much larger opportunity for authority in, and consequently of authority for, the affairs of the Party.

On the question of Youth a different approach was made. The opportunity was taken of re-organising the Leagues of Youth after the C.P. "walk out" in August. In the first place it was decided to appoint a person from the Party Executive, responsible to that body, to the League of Youth as its president. His mission was to build up a body of young workers for the Party.

The scheme has worked out satisfactorily and a much superior League to any in the past six years in East Lewisham is now in existence. Most of the members have some Party responsibility. A room at the Party Headquarters has been placed virtually at the disposal of the League for office purposes, and they have been provided with a typewriter and other equipment for their sole use.

This development of the League of Youth has shown no sign of being a "flash in the pan," and there is every reason for feeling that front rank Party people are being evolved.

Since the war attention of a political character has been largely centred on the activities of the Borough Council.

In this connection, the establishment of a virile Borough Labour Party and Trades Council, also brought to a conclusion since September, has provided additional strength to the Party organisation.

The chief lines of Party structure and activity have not been substantially altered. Care has always been taken in the establishment of every department, and the war has caused for the most part modification only of the peace time practice.

In some ways it has quickened modifications which would probably have taken place in any case, but no cracks in the structure have occurred or seem likely to do so.

## Norwich

*Here is the story of Norwich told by Jack Brooksbank, Secretary and Agent. Observe that in one ward the Agent visited 207 members—result: five members wiped out; eight new ones put on! Norwich is not a "safe" area, but it seems to be safe for Socialism.*

Like all other Labour Parties we had our difficulties at the outset of the war. The first thing I did was to send out a letter to each individual member. The result was that the nett fees from Ward associations showed an increase of £7 over the previous year. The nett fees are the sums paid to this office by Wards after they have taken the cash allowed them for running the ward machinery, which is considerable, also the commission to collectors.

Of course, we had and are having our difficulties, collectors being called to the colours, working long hours on munitions, and the difficulties of the blackout. One Ward got well behind with the collections, so serious that I felt it best to visit each of these members myself with the help of an assistant. The result was that out of 207 visits, I lost five members, but put on eight additional members, by recommendations from members.

All our Ward association committees are taking steps to not only maintain their membership, but to improve their position during the present year, and it will not be our fault if we do not show a definite advance in membership. It means consistent effort, not really hard work, but a determination that Norwich shall be in the vanguard in maintaining the necessary machinery to meet the fight when the war is over. We realise only too well that the work of years can be nullified in a few months by sitting back and taking a defeatist attitude. I have confidence in our workers, and I know they will not let us down, having regard to the fact that a break in our work would act adversely for the working class as a whole.

The Ward committees are meeting regularly, and hold social functions in order to keep the members interested. We also publish a small war-time news sheet, giving 10,000 free, and see to it that every member receives one through the agency of the collectors.



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## Deptford

*Mr. W. J. Stimpson, of Deptford, rightly reminds us that our Party was cradled in struggles and nurtured in challenge. The "fretful inactivity" of active workers which he mentions, has been known to all of us for months past when black-outs and other conditions such as absence of meetings have prevented the usual activities. Discussion classes, etc., and similar devices have been widely adopted and alternative activity instead of inactivity should be the aim. Deptford is an illustration of how that aim has been pursued, and with success.*

War came as a deep-rooted shock to all. As it changed the national life it altered the personal life. Everyone has had to adjust their daily habits to new circumstances. As with the personal life so with the life of the Party. Inevitably the very circumstance of war stopped the normal political and social activity to which we had become accustomed. This created a feeling of "fretful inaction" in a Party built on action.

In thinking of difficulties it should be remembered by all that the Labour Party was cradled in struggle, nurtured in challenge. The dynamic, driving force which has built our Movement has been the challenge expressed through electoral combat through which Parliamentary and municipal power has been achieved. It is the temporary suspension of this dynamic which is the real difficulty and which disturbs the minds of many active workers who found their satisfaction



faction in the ceaseless round of activity the Party normally engaged in, and through which the organisation found its power in membership; in finance, and in political conquest.

The membership is sound and loyal. We have suffered losses because the normal "wastage" has been accentuated by evacuation and migration due to war-work, but the outstanding and heartening fact is, that whereas in peace-time we had many resignations due to a variety of generally trivial reasons, we have had very few resignations in war-time!

In order to combat the "fretful inactivity" of active workers, we maintain Ward and Section meetings regularly, at which aspects of Party policy are expounded and discussed.

Contact with the membership is maintained by the distribution of a News-Bulletin, and in general service our Advice Bureau on war-time problems seems to be much appreciated by the citizens of the Borough, a good deal of work being done in this direction.

The members of the Women's Sections have been very busy in the knitting and making-up of garments for evacuated children and for Troops' Comforts Funds.

A Workers' War Vigilance Committee is in being and through this many problems and queries are investigated.

Social effort is curtailed by reason of the commandeering of halls for civil defence; but to minimise this, small whist drives are held in various Wards in members' homes. Also a member will grant a front room, gather about 12 to 18 people, and a discussion is started on some topical subject.

Apart from membership income, finance is a real problem—the usual ways of raising money not being available.

Generally there is an encouraging activity which is holding the active workers together. We have no fear of the political loyalty of the electors outside our membership. It is therefore the worker of the Party who is our main concern in keeping in good heart and spirit, because this seeming "standing-by," this diversion of thought and activity, is a challenge to our faith. It needs a greater loyalty, a deeper understanding, a more kindly tolerance in days that may yet be more difficult.

## Southampton

*Characteristically, Mr. Rose has gone into statistics and in the following article he unearths the roots of several problems. As he shows, his Party have applied themselves to seeking the right remedies. The methods and introspection practised by Mr. Rose are not too widely adopted in the Movement. We could wish they were.*

When a man begins to limp it does not follow that a cold compress will cure the trouble. It may be a bad corn. When our Party began to limp, we set about finding out precisely what was wrong. At the end of six months of war we made a complete survey with a view to getting an accurate picture of our condition.

Amongst other things we found that whilst meetings of the Women's Sections continued at pre-war level, the number of Ward Association meetings dropped by 53 per cent. Attendance at Ward Association meetings dropped by 27 per cent. and at Women's Section meetings by 22 per cent. Very few speakers were booked for these meetings, and only 8 per cent. were reported in the Press as compared with 24 per cent. pre-war. Overtime, war work, and similar matters seriously interfered with the work of the voluntary contribution collectors, and a loss of membership resulted. Only 16 members left the Party because they disagreed with Party policy.

The result of this survey points to some obvious steps that have to be taken. For example, increase the number and attractiveness of Ward Association meetings, organise speakers and subjects for such meetings, increase Press reports, stimulate members' interest, etc. These are problems that can be dealt with, without more than the usual organising difficulties.

The main problem is how to ensure regular collection of members' contributions. Upon the solution of that problem depends the retention of existing membership and the recruitment of new members. The problem is all the larger because we hold the view that it is vital to the success of Labour's Peace aims that the Party should be bigger and stronger when the war ends than when it began.

Our first step is to create the will and determination to overcome the difficulty. To do this, the Executive Committee is meeting in consultation

all active members of the Party, to secure their co-operation and goodwill for the following proposals.

(a) It is felt that membership retention, recruitment, and collection of contributions, cannot be isolated from other Party activities, and, therefore, action in this matter must be coupled with organised propaganda both inside and outside the Party. This propaganda to be restricted to the following two points:—

(i) To ensure that the sacrifices of this war shall not be in vain, and that the Peace Terms shall be such as to reduce to a minimum the possibility of future wars.

(ii) In order to prevent the unemployment, poverty, and misery which followed the last war from being repeated on an even larger scale, to demand the preparation of adequate plans now to provide for the rapid and smooth transition from war to peace conditions.

Constantly to emphasise that the extent to which we shall succeed in getting these two things carried out, will depend almost entirely upon the strength of our individual membership and of the volume of our public support.

(b) Endeavour to be made by an appeal to every member to reduce the number of calls for contributions from weekly to monthly, or less frequent intervals. Present arrangements involve about 1,400 calls every week.

(c) Each Ward Executive Committee, together with representatives of the Central Executive Committee, to go carefully through the list of members to select possible collectors. To each person selected, a letter to be sent, signed by the Chairman and Secretary of the Party and the Ward Secretary, stating that the member has been selected by the Executive of the Party as one who will probably be willing to help us out of our wartime difficulties by collecting from about 10 members once a month. The letter to be followed by a personal call in a few days, by a Ward official and a member of the Ward E.C., to take a collectors' book showing names and addresses of members to be collected from, and to explain precisely what is expected of a collector.

(d) As soon as an improvement in collections takes place a recruitment

campaign to be commenced, again coupled with "Labour's Peace Aims" and Reconstruction.

## Whitechapel

*Mr. A Murray, Agent to the Whitechapel and St. George's Labour Party, writes from a constituency where the members mostly live in blocks of flats. But the problems hardly vary from those of other places although the solution does, because here, as in several London constituencies, Sunday collecting is possible and profitable.*

The outstanding difficulties experienced in our Division since the commencement of the war were:—

(a) Reduction in the number of collectors owing to military service and civil defence.

(b) Evacuation and the blackout.

(c) Difficulty in securing rooms for Ward meetings.

(d) Activity on the part of a pro-Communist element, who took advantage of the conditions created by the war to undermine the Party in the hope that it would collapse.

Steps have been taken to replace the collectors who had to give up owing to the war. We have found that we could get comrades to collect from about a dozen members, who would not otherwise agree to do any collecting. As a result of this and other measures, we have been able to replace most of the collectors.

Most of our members live in blocks of flats and buildings, and this makes it more difficult to collect in the blackout. Most of our collecting has been done on Sundays and this has overcome the difficulty.

It was practically impossible to hold Ward meetings for the first four or five months of the war. We got over this difficulty by forming Ward Executive Committees to carry out the Ward organisation. We have now been able to book rooms at the libraries, and regular monthly meetings of the Ward are being held.

We took strong action against the pro-Communist element, closing down one of the Wards and exposing individuals in the other Wards. A number of them have since joined the Communist Party, which proves that our suspicions were correct and that they were more or less agents of the Communist Party.

*(The story of the Local Parties is continued on Page 58)*



# JACK CUTTER on

## CONTORTIONISTS IN COMMITTEE

A recent article of mine in these columns dealing with the organised "stool pigeons" of the Communist Party and their fifth column work inside the General Committees of the Local and Divisional Parties has induced a reader to write to me asking if I can give any details as to how they are organised, and seems to think he has put me a poser, implying that I have been basing my statements on mere suspicions rather than facts.

Accordingly, assuring my innocent friend that he should know me better than that by now, I proceed to enlighten him. It is, as we say in these parts, nae bother at a'. (Clue No. 1 for King Street).

The nomenclature of the C.P.-inspired groups seems to differ according to district. Some are known as "factions," some as "dual membership sections," some as "contact groups," and so forth. Their *modus operandi*, however, seems to be the same everywhere.

For convenience let us call them "dual membership sections." Each section has its "ordinary" and "Party" members. "Ordinary" members are Union or Labour Party delegates who are prepared to put the C.P. case and use C.P. tactics in the organisations to which they are delegated. To comply with L.P. and T.U.C. rules they do not take out C.P. membership cards, but seasoned members of the C.P. attend their meetings and act as "guides."

The "section" usually meets weekly, but sometimes there are additional meetings of sub-sections—the N.U.R. group, the T. & G.W. group or the Labour Party group, for instance, may meet apart from the entire section to discuss and decide their attitude towards the business of the next meeting of their particular organisation.

When, as often happens, members are called to a special meeting of the full section, some subterfuge is used so that the name of the Communist Party need never appear. It used to be a favourite device to send out duplicated slips inviting attendance to a meeting

of a certain famous Book Club, but now that this Book Club has fallen from grace because its Big Chief suggested there was an unpleasant odour about Stalin's Finland adventure, they will probably have found another cloak for their activities. It will be no trouble for them to form a paper organisation with a fancy name. Long practice in this field has made them experts.

Usually each section has a recognised chairman and secretary. The sub-sections have each a secretary or convener, but no regular chairman, members taking the chair in turn.

There seems to be no general rule about the payment of contributions by section members. In some places there is no evidence of any payment at all and you are allowed one guess as to where the money comes from for postages, rent, lighting, heating and duplicating. In other cases a weekly contribution is paid and in at least one district this amounts to 3d. a week.

At the full meeting of the section there is a business-like agenda, carried through with a dispatch and briskness which is a striking contrast to the time-wasting, procedure-raising and prolix speech-making tactics adopted by the same people in their capacity of L.P. delegates. An important item on the agenda is reports. Members report the name and address of any likely "recruits," i.e., any bona fide delegates to their respective organisations who have shown signs of sympathy with the speeches the section members have made. The C.P. guide makes a note of these names, and the possible recruit later receives a visit from an official of "the Party," presumably with the idea of roping him in.

The meeting then reviews the matters due to come before the organisations to which they are delegates, or decides what resolutions they should bring before such organisations. If the matter is considered important they have been known to hold rehearsals so that the most effective speakers on the subject may be chosen. The leader for the

forthcoming debate is selected and supporting speakers given their briefs.

Members are authorised to deny membership of the C.P. if challenged, and are requested not to reveal the fact that they have any association with that party.

The type which form the membership of these sections have never been noted for their sense of humour, but I imagine there must be one or two who, in the midst of all this business of comic opera espionage suddenly see the incongruity of all their discussions. They may remember that a year ago they were pleading with Labour Parties to put Socialism on the shelf as it was

not the primary issue, urging us to link up with Liberals and Tories of the Eden-Churchill-Duff-Cooper school in an effort to force Chamberlain to stand up to Hitler, and that now they are preparing their case to persuade the same Parties that Socialism is the primary purpose; that there must be no truck with capitalist parties and that Chamberlain should placate Hitler instead of fighting him. I doubt, however, if they will see anything funny in their political contortions. The Comintern has supplied them with a few stock reasons for the about-turn. The reasons are described as "political realism," and if they can't see the joke in that they are beyond hope.

## Beware of the Local Rag

The fifth-rate provincial newspapers, weekly and daily, are at it again.

The standard of British journalism, low enough before the war, is now—well, "the limit," with apologies, of course to Lansbury's old adopted title. We often wonder how "our" pretentious big dailies regard their lesser brethren of the provincial towns—the grubby weeklies and petty "evenings."

Prior to the last war many of these papers were on their last legs. Government subsidies, in the form of doped and gratis news services, plus lavish advertisements paid for by the taxpayer, put many of these rags on their feet again; for they admirably did the dirty work of the Government which the big newspapers did not care to touch.

History repeats itself. Deep as the dailies have sunk into the gutter the ragged brigade whom we indicate above are down in the drains!

It is these provincial newspapers who are flying the kites for the reactionaries who want more repression, who want industrial conscription, more plunder of the poor, and other things which our own little Hitlers would delight to have. It is they who delight to spread atrocity stories, and lying and doubtful reports. After all, the work they do is necessary we suppose to war propaganda but we at least are aware of what is happening.

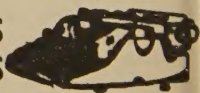
Not one, but many instances, in support of the above strictures have

come before us in the last few weeks. The provincial newspaper is, in fact, the deadliest enemy of Labour and Labour's ideals. It is our least scrupulous enemy.

The best way to meet this is by the extension as far as practicable of Labour's local newspapers and those which have closed down since the war should be revived again. We do at least get under the skin of capitalist editors when we give away what they are compelled to sell.

No light on Labour's aims, war aims, peace aims or any other aims, will penetrate to darkest England if the type of newspaper we speak of can help it. It is up to us.

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EASY TERMS



# Labour Party Finance

## Increased Affiliation Fees

As we expected, following the proposals and discussions at the Southport Conference, the N.E.C. of the Party will lay before the coming Conference proposals for increased affiliation fees.

The proposal now made is more modest than that made last year. The sixpenny affiliation fee, which we advocated nearly 20 years ago, is not yet. But it is good to see the N.E.C. taking this necessary step to set the Party on a sounder financial basis, and, we suppose, to provide for increased and necessary expenditure authorised by Conference.

We hope Local Parties will not boggle at the increase. The time has arrived for every Section of the Party, Trade Unions and Local Parties included, to examine the sufficiency of present political resources. Labour

has been penny wise and pound foolish for years past, and a bolder conception of the needs of a political Party, both nationally and locally, might conceivably have altered our whole prospects and past attainments. With increased costs and commitments Labour is well advised to face the issue, for faint-heartedness, even in money-raising, will never win, however much we woo, the fair electorate.

The new proposals provide for a flat rate affiliation fee of 5d. per member from affiliated and individual members, with a new scale for Federations, which will ease the burden for the smaller Federations—a useful and desirable reform.

We defer further comment till next month.



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## D.L.P. SECRETARIES

### List of altered addresses

The following changes of addresses of Divisional Secretaries have been notified to us by the Labour Party.

Penryn and Falmouth D.L.P.: Mr. J. H. Bennetts, 19, Duke Street, St. Austell, Cornwall.

Tavistock D.L.P.: Mr. E. E. Green, 5, King Street, Tavistock, Devon.

St. Marylebone D.L.P.: Mr. G. Butcher, 20, Parkway, Hillingdon, Middlesex.

South Oxfordshire D.L.P.: Mr. E. H. Perriman, 59, Napier Road, Cowley, Oxford.

Rotherham D.L.P.: Coun. G. C. Ball, Talbot Chambers, Moorgate, Rotherham.

Aberdeen & Kincardine Cent. L.P.: Mr. E. M. Milne, 2, Denview Place, Woodside, Aberdeen.

## CANDIDATES

### ADDITIONS

BEDS.: Bedford.—T. H. Knight, "Bam-burgh," 22 Trinity Road, Luton, Beds.

OXON.: Banbury.—H. G. Gauntlett, c/o Mrs. Ansdell, Friz Hill, Wellesbourne, Warwickshire.

YORKS.: Middlesbrough West.—Mr. D. Ramsey, 8 Bristowe Road, Grove Hill, Middlesbrough.

### DELETIONS

SOM.: Taunton.—Mr. C. W. Gott.

INVERNESS: Mr. M. MacEwen.

ESSEX: Upton.—Mr. R. D. Rees.

DERBYS.: Derby.—Mr. A. E. Hunter.

GLOS.: Cheltenham.—Mr. J. Baird.

KENT: Tonbridge.—Mr. R. G. L. Bowyer.

LINCS.: Grimsby.—Mr. Harry Brinton.

SUFFOLK: Bury St. Edmunds.—Mr. A. H. Gordon.

WARWICKS.: Edgbaston. — Mr. R. G. Wrightson.

CARNARVONSHIRE: Mr. W. Elwyn Jones.

# SIX MONTHS AFTER

## The Story Continued

### West Lewisham

*We make no apology for giving the experience of West Lewisham besides that of East Lewisham. The well-written story below is worth reading. From this article may be gathered several hints and the methods of using the press are particularly noteworthy. We thank the Agent, Mr. H. Silver, for this contribution.*

The West Lewisham Labour Party, like most other Parties, and all big-membership Parties, has had many difficulties to surmount since the outbreak of war. As space will not permit of telling the full story, I will endeavour to be as brief as possible, and only touch upon the major details.

In the first instance, September 3rd found us in a state of summer demobilisation, with funds, as a result, at the lowest ebb of the year, and most Wards and Sections, with their officers and collectors either away on holiday, thinking of taking them, or recently returned; August had been almost a blank month for meetings, and general uneasiness had lowered receipts from contributions.

Then, with the war came evacuation! Evacuation of officials, and collectors, and members! And callings-up! These troubles were followed by the requisitioning of many of our meeting places, the blackout, the absence on national service of many of our key members, and then the final blow — stoppage of football! A goodly portion of our income had gone with one swoop, immediately our weekly competition ceased.

The first and most obvious thing to do was to achieve contact with every member, and so over 2,000 general circulars were sent out. Next came provision for the collecting of subscriptions. We felt—and experience subsequently proved us to be right—that the money was there, if we went for it.

The collecting problem—a very great one—has been solved in a variety of ways. In some cases, books were split up, and a member was asked to be

responsible for calling upon five or six others in his or her street. In other cases, books have been amalgamated, and collection over a large area is done by one needy comrade on a commission basis. So much for collections. Our collectors are either outside of military age, or they are women, and we have little fear of disorganisation taking place again.

Following the same line of reasoning and having always realised the value of our womenfolk, we took steps to utilise their services to a greater degree than ever before. We have now two women Ward Secretaries, and the job is being done as well as it ever was—maybe even better!

With the re-starting of football, we got our competition under way again, building up a new connection, slowly and surely. By this time, our income, but slightly reduced, is reasonably well assured, and by such means as duplicating on both sides of a sheet of paper, we are effecting many economies.

Whist drives, etc., which are a means of keeping our members together, as well as of raising funds, are being run more frequently than ever, and more successfully. Weekly classes have been successfully established, and, by the judicious use of the full moon, we have beaten the blackout.

In conjunction with the East Lewisham Labour Party, we have had set up, practically since the outbreak of war, a Borough Women's Vigilance Committee, and have secured the active membership and co-operation of the Women's Co-operative Guilds. In addition to this, an Advice Bureau has been a prominent feature of our activities during the months under review.

Up to last September, we issued 10,000 copies per month of "The Citizen"; these were distributed free throughout the constituency, and were a valuable means of contact between ourselves, the membership, and the public. With publication suspended, due to the war, and in order to maintain our members' morale at 100 per cent., we had to find some other means of publicity.



We immediately thought of the local press. Arrangements were made for an additional G.C. meeting, to be held on a Sunday afternoon, monthly, at which a Policy Address would be given by our candidate, Arthur Skeffington, to whose work I cannot pay great enough tribute. At each of these meetings I report the address, and send the report to each of the local papers. There are four of them with a very large aggregate circulation. The report stimulates correspondence, to which the candidate and myself reply.

From the outbreak of war up to March 30th, no less than 1,461 column inches of our reports or letters have appeared in the columns of the papers concerned. That is an average of 48 inches of column per week, or 12 inches per paper. This is valuable publicity. It inspires confidence in the membership; gains prestige for the Party—and costs nothing!

With a duplicated news-sheet just commenced publication, and with a membership campaign planned in which we hope not only to make many members, but to achieve large literature sales as well, we look confidently to the future, no matter what trials it may hold.

## South Poplar

*Brief and to the point, Ald. G. J. Cressall, of South Poplar, makes a valuable suggestion regarding collectors pairing up so that one can relieve the other, presumably with back calls as well as when circumstances prevent one collector doing his job.*

In Poplar we did not have a great deal of difficulty with the collectors, but several did not think it would be of any use calling on the members, and three collectors went away with the children.

My Ward Secretaries were able to get those remaining to commence the collecting and to get other collectors in place of those who had gone away.

Great credit is due to our collectors and Ward Secretaries for the valuable work done by them during the past six months, having had such very bad weather in addition to the war.

My opinion concerning collecting is as follows:—

1. That the collector endeavours to

call at a regular time every week, preferably on a Sunday morning.

2. To avoid missed weeks to try to work in pairs so that if unable to call on a particular week to get the other collector to do his or her collecting; we are trying to get our collectors to agree to this. For it is rather difficult to ask for arrears of our contributions, and we lose a large amount through lapsed weeks.

## St. Albans

*The Chairman of St. Albans D.L.P., Mr. C. W. Dumbleton, has, it may seem, only a humdrum story to tell. It is, however, the story of dozens of similar divisions where the local parties have not looked for or secured the customary divisional aid; usually because of difficulties with divisional meetings, transit, black-out, etc. And they have also had a taste of Communist trouble. St. Albans is in with the rest of the crowd when it speaks of a general recovery from the first impact of the war and looks forward to a more encouraging time. We are confident that all the parties placed like this will find something in the experiences of others, given in this issue, both to profit from and to encourage.*

I don't think there is much that can usefully be said at the present moment. The combination of war-time conditions and the very severe winter has made Party work very difficult.

We are a scattered division, containing four large Local Parties — St. Albans, Barnet, East Barnet and Welwyn Garden City—with a skeleton organisation in the smaller places.

Each one of the four large parties has faced its difficulties in its own way without much interference or assistance from the Divisional Committee.

Apart from considerable apathy and the distraction of interest caused by the war, there has been a number of resignations due to disagreement with the Party's war policy, and there have been losses of personnel by members joining the Forces or Civil Defence services.

Despite all this there are now signs of a general recovery from the first impact of the war, and the black-out plus weather conditions which kept people indoors, and I think that in a month or two's time I shall have a more encouraging report to give.

## Chislehurst

*Mr. W. J. Tarry of the Chislehurst Divisional Labour Party writes from a typical county division with typical difficulties. Note specially the issue of a bulletin sent to country sympathisers by post.*

The Editor has asked me to tell you briefly how we are overcoming our difficulties in this division. Why, I don't know, as every Divisional Secretary considers he has the worst division in the country to organise, and I am not an exception!

Our division is divided roughly in half, one part urban, one part rural, and is 17 miles across, with no direct means of communication from one side to the other. So far as the urban areas are concerned, we have two good Party secretaries, both of whom are members of their respective Councils, and we also have some good Ward secretaries. Since the outbreak of war, we have developed bulletins in both districts, which are issued regularly to all members and friends, and where our own halls are available we have carried on with our usual work, which, although it fell off in the early days, is now getting back on its old basis.

In the rural areas, where we have consistently carried out each year open-air propaganda work, we have a good number of sympathisers, a few members, but little organisation, for the usual reasons. In order to keep in touch, we have issued regularly a bulletin specially prepared, together with literature, sending these by post, and we shall carry on again this year with our propaganda work there.

In the very early days of the war, we set up an advisory bureau, in conjunction with the Trades Council. We had 10,000 leaflets printed and distributed advertising this, and although it has meant some extra work for the Divisional Secretary, it has brought people into touch that we might not have reached in the ordinary way.

Our candidate, Mr. W. T. Colyer, has been very active in visiting all Parties and assisting with the problems that have arisen, as well as Press correspondence, and we are now arranging for a series of meetings with M.P.'s to help us not only make up our figures, but to increase our membership.

We missed gaining three further seats on the local authorities last year

by under 40 votes between them, and we lost one seat by one vote; and we shall try and get some of our people elected if there are any vacancies declared, if it is humanly possible, by petition.

There is not, I am afraid, many hints worth while in this note; we have our difficulties; but with a good team of workers, we face up to them and with the right spirit, they are overcome.

## Ilford

*Difficulties with Communists, collectors and in holding meetings are all typical of local Parties problems since the war. Mr. R. T. Holness of the Ilford T.C. and L.P. very modestly sets out below how the Party tackled these problems. "Functioning well and optimistic of the future," strikes the right note.*

The outbreak of war found the Ilford Party in the position of just recovering from the disturbance caused by the expulsion of several members of the Party because of their association with the Communist Party. The aftermath of this had certainly not died away before the war came along and for the time being seemed to knock the bottom out of everything.

Evacuation hit us very badly, and one of our Women's Sections went entirely. This, coupled with the loss of a number of collectors due to the same cause, faced us with a pretty hefty problem.

A further difficulty experienced was that the holding of Ward meetings was made almost impossible owing to lack of meeting places, nearly all of which had been taken over for some form of National Service. However, the Party, recognising the urgent necessity of maintaining the Party organisation, and also that difficulties are made to be overcome, set to work with a will.

We first decided that in order to maintain regular contact with our membership, a monthly circular should be issued. This has been done and regularly delivered, setting out the Party's activities and also briefly dealing with current events.

The problem of arranging for collections to be regularly made presented perhaps the most difficult of our tasks;



this was tackled and we have secured two old and faithful members of the Party who are collecting on a commission basis with very satisfactory results.

The Party Executive and Political Section have met regularly throughout the whole period, and last week we held the annual meeting of the Party, which was a very fine one, the spirit and determination shown was really good and we are encouraged to believe that this year will see us not only maintaining our position, but recovering the ground lost in 1939, and even improving on that.

The social side of the Party's work has been splendidly maintained by a fine band of workers on the Social Committee and has done much in helping to hold the Party together.

The Wards are now resuming regular meetings, some of which perforce have to be held in private houses, but generally speaking the Party is functioning well and in spite of the dark clouds we are optimistic of the future.

## Sunderland

*Coun. McGregor English kindly contributes the following from Sunderland. This Party's slogan has been "it pays to advertise." Here in a perilous area, "the Party meetings are attended as never before." A lesson for Parties elsewhere.*

The constituency of Sunderland is unique inasmuch as that the majority of its electors still live in the realms of gullibility, and receive their voting and political instructions from the local newspaper, which makes the business of political conversion a very arduous proposition.

[That's not "unique," brother.—Ed. "L.O."]

But this momentous position does not brake our Political Push; the Sunderland Division Labour Party and all its kindred organisations are still achieving and pursuing the path which will ultimately lead to complete success.

Our greatest achievement is that we have removed to larger and more suitable premises, and we have given this project a complete advertisement, which must have in the immediate future **big progressive results**, our slogan is "It Pays to Advertise."

We have held, and propose to carry

on, an expensive and extensive propaganda service in the constituency, and the two big meetings were an immediate success which depicts that **business will be better than usual**.

To keep our membership in numbers and interest we have circulated a great amount of free literature which is bound to have a repercussion to our future progress. To-day's sowing will bring to-morrow's **harvest**, and the sowing was in good fertility.

Our Party meetings are attended as never before and that augurs for great results; we have re-introduced internal political and social activities which are creating a strong foundation of comradeship, and through this comradeship everything becomes possible.

Recognising that movement is life, our movement is getting a move on, and that movement is in the **right direction**.

## West Fulham

*Here is the story of West Fulham told by the Agent, Mr. A. C. Powell. Thirty thousand people have left the district. Read now how the Party has triumphed despite this terrible blow.*

I welcome your invitation to contribute a short article on individual memberships in war-time. Since the outbreak of war we have lost 600 members, and I can imagine that with such a loss in some constituencies none would be left, but not so in West Fulham. Before the outbreak of war last September, our membership was 2,400; it is now 1,800.

Fulham is a vulnerable area, and during the last six months—including evacuated children—over 30,000 people have left the district. This was bound to affect our individual membership, and as a consequence we have lost some of our most active workers.

The collection of contributions is purely on a voluntary basis; we have no paid collectors and we pay no commission. Prior to last September we had 70 collectors; we now have 65. In the first month of the war we lost 18 collectors, but in the second war month, by personal visitation amongst members, I was able to obtain 16 new collectors; month by month the personnel of our collectors is still changing. Until the summer of last year, our income was averaging £25 per

month; the first month of the war it dropped to £16; it is now averaging £20 per month.

Your readers are aware of the difficulties during this winter, arising from the black-out, lack of meeting accommodation, etc., but suffice it to say that nothing will destroy a large membership more quickly than inactivity, or the impression conceived by members that nothing is being done.

Recently my Party purchased an addressograph machine, and stencils were prepared for each member of the Party. At the beginning of each month, in a correctly addressed envelope, the member is supplied with particulars of all Ward activities and any other information we require them to know.

Every week our Member, Dr. Edith Summerskill, is in the constituency dealing on behalf of constituents with all kinds of problems arising from the war, and she also keeps in touch with the Civil Defence Services. Our five Women's Sections have merged into one for the duration, and meet fortnightly at the Town Hall. They have organised a Comforts Fund; whist drives are held in each others' homes and socials arranged, the profits of which go to the fund to send articles of a useful nature with a message from the Party occasionally to members serving in H.M. Forces. On April 2nd all our members were invited to a free social and dance at St. Clement's Hall, when professional artistes were engaged for the social part of the evening.

Last week our annual meeting was held, and we closed the year with no accounts outstanding, and with £100 in our General Account and £150 in our Election Fund Account. The annual report is being printed, with a special message and account of the work of the Parliamentary Labour Party by "our member," and a copy is being sent by post to each member.

Whatever revenue-producing schemes one may evolve, none will beat the steady regular weekly flow of membership contributors, which will stand the test of any circumstances that may arise—even a war!

For the above achievement, praise is due to our splendid band of men and women collectors, who, unheralded and unsung, in season and out, in all kinds of weather, carry out this splendid job of work which forms the backbone of our Party machine.

All the aforementioned activities have a bearing on Party membership, and during the coming months we hope to increase our membership to make up for the 600 lost. Even as I write these notes, two collectors have come into my office with four new members, which shows that members can be enrolled even in war-time.

## Derby

*In the following by Coun. H. J. T. Russell, Secretary and Agent to the Derby Labour Party, one gathers that membership, and how to build and retain it, is the predominant problem before the Party. Mr. Russell gives several hints on methods which appear to have paid.*

Since the war commenced we have been faced with many difficulties in connection with the question of individual membership, difficulties which I am sure have been experienced by most constituencies, but one of our main difficulties has been the lack of sufficient keen collectors.

Prior to the war we had hopes in Derby of reporting a large increase at the end of 1939. In the early summer of last year a special circular was prepared announcing the selection of the prospective Local Government Candidate and also making a special appeal to people to take up membership with the Party.

Several thousands of this circular were distributed in the Wards concerned. It contained a photograph of the candidate and a tear-off slip giving full details of membership and an invitation to join the Labour Party, with the intimation that the slip would be called for.

After a short time it was reported by most of the Wards concerned that the scheme was proving successful and that a number of new members had been made.

Unfortunately, with the coming of the war in September, a number of old members who had been in the habit of paying their subscriptions in the last quarter of the year were simply not called upon, due to the fact that the black-out conditions prevented the collectors from carrying on with their normal work at the time which was most convenient, namely, the evenings.



The abnormal weather, illness and the black-out again prevented a start being made during the early part of this year, but I feel certain that providing plans are made immediately and right methods adopted, we should not only regain those members, but should show an increase at the end of the present year, as already quite a few people have intimated their willingness to join up with the Party, and have been enrolled.

There are a number of methods which we have used in the recruitment of members. Perhaps one of the best is the special or personal letter addressed to lapsed members or to people who are known supporters of the Labour Party. Good results are bound to accrue from this method, providing the matter is religiously followed up by the Ward Secretary and his Committee.

Another method which has proved to be very successful is to arrange for one night per week to be devoted to an area in which it is known there are prospective members, and if the Ward Secretary has spent a little time in preparing a list of such people, it is a great advantage.

The Party pamphlets are again a great help and often a pamphlet sold to a person is the means, if followed up fairly quickly, of enrolling that person as a member of the Party.

It is important to choose the right time for this work. For instance, if a call is made on the night on which most of the workers have received their wage packets, they are more likely to be in a mood to make a contribution.

One of the difficulties we have to face is that most of our keen Party workers have "other irons in the fire" in the various Sections of the Movement, and consequently they have not a large amount of time to devote to the important question of membership.

It is very necessary, therefore, that we should impress upon every Ward Chairman, Secretary, Town Councillor and Trade Union official, that they can be of great assistance by making this a matter of interest at every meeting. In particular "a word in season" by the Trade Union official to his members would help the Ward Secretary considerably.

Here in Derby every Ward was asked to make this matter an item of first-class importance by placing it on the agenda for discussion at the meetings during January and February, and a number of our Wards have decided to embark upon a Membership Campaign during the Spring and Summer, from which we hope to considerably increase our present number.

There are a variety of ways in which it is possible to approach this matter, but whatever method is used, it is certain that the question of Individual Membership is one that has to be seriously tackled by all concerned, for if the Party is to grow it is necessary to bring many more people into active association with it.

The importance of this and the need to keep our organisation alive and efficient must be brought home to the members in every Section of the Movement.

Finally, if the Party leadership continues to set the right example by keeping up a virile opposition to the present Government, and continuously puts forward the Socialist case, there should be no dearth of people who will be attracted to membership of the Labour Party.

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## Oldham

*Mr. Arnold Tweedale in a short message makes no secret of the losses Oldham has sustained. A normal loss of 500 to 600 members per annum, due to removals, deaths and similar causes, is no small problem however, and it is good to note that the Party is not disheartened and will shortly commence its usual summer membership drive.*

Immediately on the outbreak of war collectors were informed to continue collections as in normal times, and that if the black-out in any way hindered their usual calls that arrangements be made with members to collect during Saturday afternoon.

That was done, but it was found that many of the members were out shopping during the afternoon and back calls had to be made. There has also been difficulty in finding collectors when collectors have resigned owing to being called up for military service or finding it impossible to collect owing to working late. Women have been encouraged to take this important work on, and in two or three instances have accepted, and this experiment is meeting with success.

Naturally, with so many difficulties, the membership has suffered, but allowing for the depreciation in membership of removals, deaths and other causes (which vary from 500 to 600 yearly in normal times) it is estimated that the membership, under the present circumstances, has been depleted by 800, but arrangements are well in hand now that the lighter days are here, to commence our usual membership drive, when it is hoped to make up the leeway that has been lost.

## Clayton

*In the Clayton Division of Manchester, we gather from Ben Clare, the main difficulty has been the black-out. Clayton has had five Advice Bureaux for some time in different parts of the Constituency. Note that hint about giving enquirers something to read.*

“Removals and Deaths” play havoc with a Party's individual membership, and an agent and/or secretary must always be on the alert to keep up the

aggregate in these times, apart from trying to increase it.

At the outbreak of war we were just commencing an autumn campaign for new membership, but with the coming of the “Blackout” this had to be cut short. Then the Evacuation Order affected us, as we are in a danger zone and quite a number of mothers went away so we were bound to suffer a reduction in membership.

Now we endeavour to keep in touch with the electorate at our various Advice Bureaux, having for many years had at least five in various parts of the constituency, to which residents come to seek advice on all subjects. We always have some literature handy and it is rare that an enquirer leaves without an appeal of some kind to read. In connection with deaths (and we have had a good number this winter) I always send a letter of condolence to the relatives and we usually get another member of that family to keep up the connection.

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